

HOT TOPICS
Smoking and Health Issues

Preface

On occasion Brown & Williamson is asked to clarify its position on smoking and health issues. Others may also, from time to time, attempt to characterize our views on smoking and health, and this characterization may not always be accurate. We are, therefore, issuing these statements to make clear where we stand and to explain the basis for our position on these issues. Nevertheless, Brown & Williamson believes that smokers should rely on the advice of appropriate health authorities such as the Surgeon General for information on smoking and health, including the conclusions that smoking causes disease and is addictive.

Smoking and Disease

Brown & Williamson believes that people who choose to smoke are accepting significant health risks, and that, in the most simple and commonly understood sense, smoking is the cause of certain diseases.

Deciding whether or not smoking causes disease in groups of people involves comparing the evidence that is available with a set of 'criteria for causation' laid out by the U.S. Surgeon General and others, which cover both statistical and non-statistical evidence. It is then necessary to make a judgment about whether the evidence fits the criteria.

In our view, it is appropriate to make judgments about the health effects of smoking primarily upon statistical evidence when the objective of the assessment is to shape public health policy concerning tobacco use. Epidemiological (statistical) studies of cigarette smoking and various diseases show that groups of smokers have a significantly increased incidence of those diseases compared to nonsmokers. The strength of the reported risks varies from one disease to another, from one population to another and with the amount smoked. The percentage of smokers developing diseases like lung cancer also varies between different populations. Nevertheless, for certain diseases, including lung cancer, studies in the U.S. and elsewhere indicate that the risks are strong and consistent. This suggests that smoking is a cause of (or a contributor to) disease in humans. However, we know of no way to verify that smoking is a cause of any particular person's adverse health or why smoking may have adverse health effects on some people and not others.

Warning the public is a primary objective of public health authorities, and the available evidence - in particular, the strength of the statistical evidence - is sufficient for them to make the judgment that smoking causes disease. If the judgment is based on statistical criteria, we agree that the evidence is sufficient to determine that smoking causes disease. Therefore, Brown & Williamson believes it is appropriate for the public health community to conclude and warn the public that cigarette smoking causes certain diseases.

On the other hand, as a manufacturer of cigarettes, the role of Brown & Williamson is very different from that of public health authorities. Our objective in analyzing the evidence on smoking and disease is to understand our product better and to do the best we can and aim to produce a less hazardous product even with the uncertainties that exist on exactly what constitutes a less hazardous product. Given this objective, we place greater emphasis on experimental (non-statistical) evidence than is required for public health authorities as this is the best source of information to provide us with practical guidance on how to modify our products to reduce the risks of smoking. While much is known about the health risks of cigarette smoking, there is no consensus among scientists about how exactly smoking might contribute to disease. Ultimately it is the biological sciences, rather than medical statistics, which will make the major contribution to this knowledge.